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ABSTRACT

Mass communication researchers have largely ignored the role of audio media and popular music in the lives of children, yet the available evidence shows that children do listen. Extant studies yield a consistent developmental portrait of childrens' listening frequency, but there is a notable lack of programatic research over the past decade, one in which stereophonic and tape playback systems proliferated widely, FM music formats generated greater market stratification, and cultural markets for preteen-oriented entertainers became established. Children can usually name performers and musical genres they prefer. In addition, the social aspect of listening seems to cover several of the same functions as television viewing, including entertainment and passing the time, and has some unique functions; for example, friendships may be established on shared musical taste. From song lyrics, young listeners may learn new vocabulary, ideas, and other life styles or world views. Usage and ownership patterns of audio equipment, children's accounts of their audio media use and perceptions, and sensitive analyses of textual significance of characters, actions, and atmospheres are logical areas to be explored in future investigations. (CRH)

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THE ROLE OF AUDIO MEDIA IN THE LIVES OF CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

Mass communication researchers have largely ignored the role of audio media and popular music in the lives of children. Yet, the available evidence shows that children do listen. This article reviews the current state of our knowledge, presents some observations regarding the possible consequences of listening, and suggests some logical next steps in exploring the area.

Audio media are the neglected stepchildren of mass communication research. Certainly within the context of children's uses and perceptions of media, the issues raised and data gathered have been overwhelmingly skewed toward television. This imbalance is well-documented in recent reviews (NIMH, 1982; Roberts and Bachen, 1981; Wartella, Alexander and Lemish, 1979). The Roberts and Bachen review of "mass communication effects," for instance, makes literally no mention of either radio or music listening. This is not so much an oversight on their part, however, as a simple reflection of the fact that the work is not being done.

Anderson's recent call for communication research of the child's ecology of information invites the consideration of audio as an integral part of many children's development (Anderson, 1981). In this paper we will summarize what little is known about children and audio media, refer to some data we have recently collected, and make a case that audio plays an important and unique role in the lives of children, one which demands study if we seriously mean to talk about the child's "ecology of information."

PATTERNS OF LISTENING

It is known, of course, that adolescents use audio extensively--primarily as sources of popular music--and that these media may play a significant role in their socialization. This is not to suggest that our knowledge of adolescents and audio is advanced; it is, however, more advanced than the literature concerning younger children's listening patterns. It seems likely that audio use patterns do not appear ab ovo at the advent of adolescence, but rather are shaped to a great extent by childhood experience.

Listening Frequency

We have but a few, isolated citations of childhood usage patterns of radio and sound recording media. These studies, though, do yield a relatively consistent developmental portrait of listening frequency. Before presenting those data, however, we should note that there has been a notable lack of programmatic research of children's listening patterns over the last ten years, a period in which stereophonic and tape playback systems proliferated widely, FM music formats generated greater market stratification, and cultural markets for pre-teen-oriented entertainers became established. Further, the range of descriptive predictors of audio use among children rarely goes beyond demographic and socio-economic indices which, when controlled, often show age to be the strongest predictor (Greenberg, 1973), though it is doubtful whether biological maturation can be accepted as an adequate "reason" for differences in response to cultural environments.

There is no question that children listen to audio media. Primarily they listen--like the rest of the population--for music. (For that reason, we will at times refer to popular music and audio media almost interchangeably. We know of no data indicating that today's children listen for news or talk; to the young listener, audio is music.) How often and how much do they listen? The first question is more easily answered than the second, though there is some evidence on both. One of the earliest documentations of children's radio consumption since the introduction of television comes out of the landmark investigation by Schramm, Lyle, and Parker (1961) of children's uses of television. The authors found radio listening to average approximately one hour a day among children living in areas with television coverage, with a dramatic increase

occurring with the advent of adolescence. Girls reported slightly more listening than boys across all grade levels.

In Lyle and Hoffman's extensive study (Lyle and Hoffman, 1972) of first, sixth, and tenth-grade children's uses of media, almost half of the first grade sample reported having listened to radio the preceding day, with another 26% citing some radio listening during the preceding week; no significant differences between boys and girls were found. For the sixth and tenth grade respondents, daily radio listening showed large step-wise increases, with girls demonstrating heavier overall listening. Of the sixth grade boy sample, 29% reported two or more hours per school day devoted to radio listening, while 44% of the sixth grade girls listened at that level. A British report at about the same time showed the same trends--older children watched more than younger, girls more than boys--though the actual time spent was less than in Lyle and Hoffman's U.S. sample, probably due to the restricted availability of pop music on the British dial at the time (Greenberg, 1973). A more recent report showed widespread use of radio as early as the 6-8 year age range; mothers' reports indicated that 59% of these children were doing at least some listening, rising to 92% by 15-17. Thirty-four percent of the 6-8 year old girls reported using radio "a lot" as a free time activity, compared to 29% of the same age boys; this slightly heavier use by girls continued through adolescence (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1980).

Audio is more than just radio, of course. A great deal of listening occurs in the home and elsewhere with records and tapes. Unfortunately the data here are even sparser than with radio. Young children are, of course, quite capable of operating record players, and appear to do so with some frequency, although the independence of their activity from joint usage

occasions with siblings or peers remains to be determined. Lyle and Hoffman report that 44% of the first grade boy respondents and 57% of the girl respondents had played records "within the last week." The Newspaper Advertising Bureau study confirms that approximately one-third of children between ages six and eleven report "a lot" of free time devoted to record playing, with a dramatic increase in this activity between ages eleven and thirteen, when reported record playing nearly doubles. We found no data concerning the frequency of audio tape listening by children, possibly because (as noted above) the audio cassette technology has achieved most of its penetration since many of the relevant studies were carried out. In any case, the data on time spent listening and frequency of listening behavior do lead to some conclusions: children listen; girls listen more than boys; and listening increases with age.

Apart from these simple conclusions, the data on amount of use do not seem to give a very good picture of the importance of audio media are in children's lives. As we have noted, the hardware environment has changed a lot over the last few years, thus many of the data are perhaps too old to be of much help. The process of synthesis is made difficult by inconsistency among the available studies in questions asked, categories used, and so on. Beyond these problems, though, it may be that amount of listening is particularly hard to measure. Difficult as the measurement problems are with TV viewing, they seem even more difficult with listening. Visual orientation to a TV set is a fairly objective and verifiable measure of "viewing." Listening, however, really cannot be observed but must be reported. Visual orientation, for instance, is no clue at all--very few people do their listening while staring at the speakers.

Not only is it hard for an observer to tell if a person is listening, but a listener may be only faintly aware him/herself of the presence of audio media in the environment. Frequently music is very much in the background, as in the case of piped-in supermarket sounds. Is this the same sort of listening as when one buys a favorite group's new LP and puts it on the home stereo for the first time? Probably not. Furthermore, even when listening is the primary activity, it is difficult for the listener to estimate duration in terms of hours and minutes; tapes, records, radio formats are not packaged into the discrete half or one half hour lengths characteristic of television. For these various reasons, then, we must turn to other sorts of data in order to fill in the picture of audio in the lives of children.

OWNERSHIP AND PURCHASE PATTERNS

One such class of data concerns children's purchase, ownership and possession of audio hardware and software. While young children are obviously limited in this regard by their economic dependency, many do purchase records and tapes, and many own or have the private use of various audio equipment. Lyle and Hoffman (1972) reported that 56% of sixth grade boys and 48% of sixth grade girls owned record players, tape recorders, or both. A more recent marketing survey of the readers of four magazines directed to the 2-16 year old market (respondents were either parents or the children themselves) revealed that of some 2000 respondents who returned questionnaries, two thirds had radios, nearly two-thirds owned record players, and one third had cassette players (Bunchez, 1978). In a recent pilot study we carried out involving 17 northwest Pennsylvania children between 5 and 13, we asked parents what audio equipment chidlren

either owned or had in their rooms. Thirteen of the 17 had radios, 10 had record players, and 8 (almost half) had an audio cassette deck. All but two of the children had at least one of these.

Obviously, many children also purchase records and tapes, though recent data on young children's software purchase patterns are unavailable. In Lyle and Hoffman's sample of sixth graders 49% had bought singles during the preceding month, 30% LP's, and a smaller percentage had bought tape products. One would expect that these patterns might well have changed in the last ten years, though the hard data are not there. In any case, the pattern of hardware ownership and possession strongly suggests that software purchases are not likely to have declined in the last decade. Overall, the conclusion is inescapable that many children are immersed in a rich and variegated audio environment at quite an early age.

CHILDREN'S MUSIC PREFERENCES

Though most children are first introduced to recorded music in the form of "children's" songs played for them by their parents, the trend in music preference as children advance in grade levels is one of growing conformance to a pattern of choice of "popular music." Greer, Dorow and Randall (1974) view the transition from third to fourth grades as "pivotal" in students' proclivities for rock music over other forms. Furthermore, this growing taste for pop or rock seems to be rather impervious to adult approval of other, "high taste" forms, as indicated by an experimental study involving fifth graders (Greer et al., 1973).

Our own interviews show that children not only have preferences, but generally can name their favorite genre as well as list one or two favorite groups which fit in that genre. We asked children (again, between 5 and

13) "What kind of music do you like best?" In our small sample, 11 of 13 eight to thirteen year olds named a commonly accepted genre of music. In by far the majority of cases, the favorite was a type of pop music, whether "pop rock," "punk rock," "soft rock," "Top 40," or "rock." Two children cited "Christian" music as their favorites, and two others cited no particular genre but described a type of beat they liked. All these children could name at least one, and usually two, favorite performers: the two who preferred "Christian" music named groups within that genre; the rest named pop performers, such as Michael Jackson, Irene Cara, Survivor, Olivia Newton John, Laura Brannigan, Men At Work, Hall and Oates, the Doors and the Beach Boys. The four children seven and younger did not respond with a genre of music, pop or otherwise. One liked "Sesame Street" and one had no interest in nor awareness of music of any type. The other two had clearly heard some pop music, though, and it had registered; one cited "Xanadu" (a pop hit) as the favorite type of music; the other liked "fast and dancy" music best and was able to recite some lyrics ("Celebrate good times, come on").

If children enjoy listening, and they clearly do, what structural elements are salient to them? To most teenagers, it is apparently more the "sound" or the "beat" rather than the words which determine preferences (Robinson and Hirsch, 1969). The case appears much the same with children. Recent research on the musical taste preferences of a sample of fifth graders shows rankings clustering closely for the following genres (in order of popularity): easy listening pop, rock, ragtime, Dixie, march, and country & Western/bluegrass. The apparent commonality underlying these "liking" ratings was the heightened tempo or beat evident in these genres; presence or complexity of lyrics did not play a strong part in the

responses (LeBlanc, 1979). When we asked the children in our sample what they liked about listening, 6 of the 17 cited the "sound" or the "beat" while only two mentioned the lyrics or words; others cited more general gratifications, such as listening for company, "it keeps you going," or the vague "I just like the tunes," which could mean the beat, the lyrics, the instrumentation, or combinations thereof.

Perhaps the most ambitious study of the factors involved in children's music preferences is that of Boyle, Hosterman and Ramsey (1981). They tapped with survey items several variables which might influence pop music selections, including: (a) sociocultural factors, including peer influence, "hear it on the radio," danceability and sentiment; and (b) formal features, including melody, harmony, rhythm, instrumentation, singer/group, and mood. The most salient dimensions for the 5th graders were danceability, peer influence and sentiment. With the exception of sentiment, the sociocultural factors seemed to increase in importance into adolescence. The importance of hearing a song on the radio increased until 9th grade, then declined sharply through college. The formal features which appeared most influential in children's music choices were, in rank order: melody, rhythm, mood and lyrics. This basic pattern held throughout the age range. Finally, the authors observe that amount of music experience was related inversely to dependence on peer opinions, as well as to the perceived importance of danceability and hearing a song on the radio. The use of survey items to tap these "influences" (particularly in the absence of any independent measures of audio listening behavior) and the inevitable risk that respondents may, for reasons of social desirability, underestimate their dependence on the various factors, temper our confidence in the reported relationships. Still, this study points to

some initial directions for conceptualizing the dynamics of children's music tastes, and it gives a sense of the complexity of the issues involved. It is obvious that if one wishes to understand how listening figures into children's lives, it is necessary to go beyond the characteristics of the music itself and consider what it is that children seem to get from listening and how listening fits into the broader texture of children's family and social environment. It is to these considerations that we now turn.

CHILDREN'S PERSONAL AND SOCIAL USES OF LISTENING

While the data regarding patterns of usage, ownership/purchase and preferences suggest that audio media have a place in children's lives, there is little systematic evidence concerning what that place is--in other words, why children listen and what functions listening serves for them. In this section we will summarize what is known and supplement the section with observations derived from our own talks with children. It might be useful, as a point of departure, to consider the uses <u>television</u> has for children. Rubin (1979), reports six apparently independent types of motivations for children's televiewing. They are, in rank order of their seeming importance to children (9-13 years): (1) to pass the time (viewing out of habit was included here as well as the vague "I just like it" motivation; (2) arousal (it's thrilling, exciting); (3) relaxation (pleasant rest); (4) companionship (for company); and finally, two factors which were apparently <u>not</u> important motivators, (5) to learn (about the self, world, others); and (6) to forget or escape.

The available evidence indicates that many of the same motivations apply to listening. For instance, Lyle and Hoffman (1972) found "listening to music" (subsuming radio and sound recordings) more likely to be cited by

sixth graders than other media when the respondents wanted to relax, be entertained, or when they felt lonely. The use of music for these reasons--and also for situations when someone "has hurt your feelings" or "made you angry"--became the overwhelming choice over other media by the tenth grade, with girls particularly likely to use music as a recourse during those situations. In our recent interviews, we asked children what they liked about listening to music (they all claimed they did like it) and found some of these uses and others. A common response was a general "I just like it" or to "pass the time," (5 of 17), though several specifically cited the "sound" or the "beat" (6 of 17), and two mentioned the lyrics. Three children mentioned that they listened for the company (see also Dominick 1974), and references were also made by individuals to arousal ("it keeps you going") and to what could be called accompaniment ("it makes what you're doing more fun").

Our sample was small and our measures unrefined. Yet some tentative observations may be warranted. First, listening does serve some of the same functions as viewing. In both cases entertainment and passing the time are important, and both media seem capable of serving the role as surrogate companion. Information-seeking or learning is not apparently a strong motivation for use in either case. Obviously, the very natures of video and audio dictate that some uses will be different. For instance, television (except as a conveyor of music) has no "sound," no "beat" to dance to. And even the superficial similarities between children's uses of audio and video may be misleading. Both may be "entertaining," but do they entertain in the same way? Both may help to relieve loneliness, but are the dynamics the same? Obviously more data are needed here. Generally, though, it seems clear to us simply from the readiness with

which children can respond to the question, "What do you like about listening to music?", as well as the specificity of many of their responses, that listening fulfills some important needs for many children.

Children may, of course, be either unaware of or unable to articulate some of the uses they have for listening. In this connection, it is interesting that our study failed to elicit a single direct reference to a social use, i.e., a use of listening as a lubricant of peer or family interaction, a focus of orientation, a symbol of in-group vs. out-group feelings, and so on. Yet is is within the contexts of family and peer group relations that the functions of audio in children's lives may most meaningfully diverge from those of television.

Of course, the interweaving of popular music and teen culture(s) and group interaction has received some considerable attention. For many teenagers, music plays a central role in the movement psychologically and socially away from the family and toward the peer group. Music is the focus of the search for group identity: musical taste separates young from old, and young from young--i.e., different music tastes define sub-groups in youth culture (Frith, 1978). In addition, shared musical taste can, for teens, be an important factor in determining friendships (Frith, 1978; Clarke, 1971). Overall, listening to music, whether it is the "accompaniment of leisure" or the "focus of leisure" (Frith, 1978) is very much a part of the adolescent social world.

The likely role of listening in the social and family life of younger children is bound to be influenced and defined by the myriad ways in which their psychology, biology and society differ from adolescents and young adults. Opportunities for use, hardware availabilities, and music selection range for children are apt to be constrained in a manner

different than adolescents. And of course "children" are not a homogeneous class. The life of a five year old is just as different from that of a twelve year old as the twelve year old's is from the high school student. Even within age groups, such factors as social class and family communication environments will also play a part.

Overall though, does listening play a part in children's family and social lives? Apparently yes, though the evidence is sketchy. Lyle and Hoffman (1972) found that audio media use underpinned many peer meeting occasions as early as the sixth grade; in their sample, "only 31 percent of both sixth and tenth graders said that they usually listened to records alone" (Lyle and Hoffman, 1972, p. 164). We would also suggest that the apparent associations among advancing age, growing peer group orientation and heightened interest in music listening reflect a trend toward sharper demarcations between family media occasions and personal or peer media occasions. This trend in patterns of audio media use would be quite consistent with a more general development among children in adolescent transition of progressively more heterogeneous "social maps"--that is, the child's perceptions of those taking an interest in his/her life begin to include a smaller proportion of adults and institutional representatives (e.g., teachers) (Garbarino et al., 1978).

In other words, the involvement of audio in the process of orientation away from the family and the solidification of personal and group identities may spring from roots in earlier childhood. In our interviews, for instance, we found that audio media apparently were used differently from television in this regard. Children reported listening to music either alone or with friends more often and with family and siblings less often as compared to television. Thus, for children television tends to be

a medium of family orientation; listening is the medium of self and/or peer orientation.

Television seems to have some important "social uses" within the family (Lull, 1980; Medrich et al., 1982). Many parents express concern about the influence of television on their children, and though they may not actually do very much to police their children's viewing (Comstock et al., 1978), it is common for parents to interact with children concerning television programs, thus shaping the process through which TV has its impact (Messaris, 1982). In contrast, if music has social uses for children, these uses may be more focused on the development and maintenance of friendships and peer group membership. This, of course is the typical "teen" pattern (Clarke, 1973; Frith, 1978; Larson and Kubey, 1983); we are suggesting that the pattern may develop even earlier. The precise nature of children's social uses of audio remains to be determined. Based on what little evidence we currently have, it would seem that since audio is often enjoyed in privacy with peers, if not in solitude, the use of radio, record players, and tape/cassette players may operate for the child as one element in the creation of a proxemically and symbolically self-defined world within the family. One major difference between television and radio in this regard is instructive: mothers' attitudes toward their children's radio listening is characterized by near-complete approval or indifference, suggesting that a child's radio use "creates little cause for family controversy" (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1980, p. 39).

In sum, it appears that although children's uses for listening bear some similarities to both their motivations for watching television and adolescents' uses for popular music, there may well be important age-related and media-related differences. If listening begins as early as

four or five, one would obviously expect, as suggested above, substantial and continual changes in the role played by audio media through the span of childhood on into adolescent transition. If indeed these media are important to some children, and we believe they are, then our crucial research priority must be to illuminate the nature of audio use from a developmental perspective.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF AUDIO USE FOR CHILDREN

So, children do attend to audio media, can articulate preferences, and seem to get something out of the listening process. To our knowledge, however, no researcher has empirically tested even the most obvious questions concerning the impact of radio and/or pop music on children's behavior, attitudes, or cognitions. In the absence of such research, comments on the impact of listening must be speculative. We will mention briefly some angles from which the broad question may be approached, while recognizing that the highest priority at this time is to fill in our knowledge of patterns of use.

The Nature of Popular Music Lyrics. The process through which song lyrics might affect children's cognitions is doubtless very complex, depending not only on the lyrics themselves but a host of situational, social, cultural and individual variables. Still, the logical place to begin is with a look at what messages or themes the lyrics "apparently" contain, then to proceed to questions concerning the ways these symbols might be interpreted by children and what the implications might be for their thoughts and behavior.

There have been several content analyses of popular music lyrics over the years, and they are well reviewed elsewhere (Rice, 1980). As is often the case with content and analyses, categories vary from study to study and criteria for classification are frequently left unexplained, so the various studies are difficult to compare. By way of background, however, Mooney (1968) reported that by far the majority of popular songs prior to the rock era (1890-1950) dealt with some aspect of romantic love. This basic preoccupation persisted through to early rock music, and even today variations on this theme constitute the biggest single focus of attention in pop lyrics. Rice (1980) content analyzed the lyrics of the 1976 Top 40 Country/Western (CW), Easy Listening (EZL), Rhythm and Blues (R&B), and Popular (essentially rock) recordings. He found that, compared to earlier musical eras, love themes were still the most popular yet declining, and that they had taken on a predominantly sad tone. In all but R&B more songs dealt with the "downward course of the relationship" or "being left alone afterward" than with what Rice called the "honeymoon" phase. Other themes were significantly present: 15% of the CW songs concerned "family values," 27% of the rock and 22% of the R&B songs were about dancing (this was at the height of the disco vogue), and 11% of the EZL tunes had to do with "personal identify" (the definition of which is not made clear). And at various times during the rock era different sorts of themes have assumed a certain prominence, such as drugs, religion, social change, dancing, and drinking.

While such data do provide a general sense of the concerns of popular music and some sense of the differences among genres and eras, there is more "information" in popular music than these global categories reveal. Lyrics tell stories about people as they meet, exchange glances, fall in

love, as they encounter problems and cope with them, and so on. There is a great deal of specific information about how to feel and act, not only in love but in a variety of other situations.

On the subject of heterosexual relationships, a sample from the 1983 hit list might include Bob Seger's rather straightforward description of a scene in a roadside bar;

> Twelve hours out of Mackinaw City
> Stopped in a bar to have a brew
> Met a girl and we had a few drinks
> And I told her what I'd decided to do . . .

or this breakup of a relationship (Christopher Cross);

> Well, I read it in town,
> In the meloncholy news,
> The front page story is our love is through . . .

or purely sexual themes, including Loverboy's

> She's turnin' on the heat, she's got the magic touch
> She's turnin' on the heat, oooh and it's a little too much
> She's turnin' on the heat, it's a hundred above
> Hot girls in love, hot girls in love . . .;

and (from the Chi-lites)

> From the rooter to the scooter
> You're a bad motor scooter, straight up
> From the rooter to the tooter
> You're a bad motor scooter.

And we see one way of reacting when a love affair ends (The Police);

> Oh can't you see, you belong to me
> How my son heart aches, with every step you take,
> Every move you make, every vow you break,
> Every smile you take, every claim you stake,
> I'll be watching you.

And there are other topics, too, treated with varying degrees of ambiguity. For example, from Michael Jackson's "Beat It!":

> You have to show them that you're really not scared
> You're playin' with your life, this ain't no truth or dare,
> They'll kick you, then they beat you
> Then they'll tell you it's fair
> So beat it . . . .

Or from Pink Floyd's "Not Now John" a (presumably) political theme:

> Fuck all that, we've got to get on with these
> We've got to compete with the wily Japanese
> There's too many home fires burning, and not enough trees,
> So fuck all that we've got to get on with these.
> Can't stop, lose job, mind gone, silicon,
> What bomb, get away, pay day, make hay,
> Break down, need fix, big six
> Clickey click, hold on, oh no, brrrring bingo (Song Hits, 1983).

Lyrics deal with a range of subjects, and vary in their treatment of these subjects from literal to inscrutable. In some cases, the "informed" listener may be fairly confident what the song is "about," in others any such surmising is done at great peril. In considering children's reactions to lyrics, and what they might possibly learn from them, it is of course important to bear in mind that they will have even more trouble deciphering lyrics than teenagers or adults do. Hirsch (1971) reports that only about 30% of teenagers could state correctly the message contained in four 1960's "protest songs," and young children would clearly fare worse. In any case, pop music lyrics are not likely to have any great cognitive impact at the rarified level of political or social values addressed subtly and allegorically.

On the other hand, we might expect some learning--whether or not it reflects an "accurate" reading--concerning those aspects of everyday life which are portrayed in a relatively straighforward, uncomplicated, yet highly evocative manner in pop songs. In some cases, there may be information in the lyrics about realms completely outside the child's experience; even a child who has never seen the ocean or a surfboard may be able to give an account of how to catch the best wave. Or a country child who has no concept of urban youth gangs may be introduced to them by Michael Jackson's "Beat It!" (Interestingly, Michael Jackson seemed to be

the favorite artist of the white, small-town, grade school children we interviewed.) And confusion about what lyrics mean may spur children to seek information from older siblings and peers--in this case, the learning would be indirect, but audio would have played a critical role.

As we have noted, most children, like most adolescents, choose music primarily on the basis of the "sound" or the "beat," rather than the lyrics. This in no way implies, however, that lyrics are ignored. Indeed, most of the children we interviewed had no trouble reciting lyrics from a favorite song. We suspect that lyrics are attended to, processed, stored and recited by children.

The child listener is, in a sense, an eavesdropper, tuning in to a message not really intended for him, but which is still full of information about the exigencies of roles he will assume in the future. It has been suggested, for instance, that many cross-sex behaviors are learned prior to adolescence from the media, to be applied later on during adolescence (Matteson, 1975). At this point we are not prepared to say how audio may compare with television on this level, but it is interesting to note that it is television, the medium which more reflects the adult agenda to begin with (Larson and Kubey, 1983), which parents apparently feel more need to mediate. Popular music is left to purvey its manifesto in the relative absence of parental concern and intervention. We simply raise here the possibility that music lyrics may play a part in children's "anticipatory socialization," whether in terms of setting a tone--and a predominantly sad and pessimistic one at that (e.g., the Christopher Cross or Police lyrics above), with its many encapsulated vignettes (e.g., Bob Seger's roadside assignation), or cultivates more specific behavioral menus or "social scripts" (Abelson, 1981; Schank and Abelson, 1977).

Other learning is possible, too. For many, Michael Jackson's "Beat It!" (especially when accompanied by its video) paints pictures of an otherwise alien world, thus expanding life space; the Chi-Lites ("From the rooter to the tooter. . .") expand vocabulary as well. Thus, while not foreclosing the possibility that lyrics may have consequences for broad social/political values (e.g. Pink Floyd above), the more accessible and developmentally relevant lyrical themes and elements are more likely sources (either direct or indirect) of social learning.

Beyond Lyrics; Some Nonverbal Processes. Up to now, we have been concerned with lyrics, the verbal content of popular music. But apparently to most listeners it is the "sound" which most attracts attention. It is therefore logical to ask what the implications of listening to music as music may be for the individual and for society (while not forgetting that the lyrics as sung are a part of that gestalt).

The consequences of listening may depend, we feel, on the style of listening behavior. For the sake of discussion, assume that a meaningful distinction can be drawn between: (a) primary listening, in which the music is the focus of attention and the listener is highly involved in the listening process; and (b) secondary listening, which occurs while the listener's attention is directed toward other activities and during which the music is largely in the background. In theory, the impact of heavy primary listening, which by our definition denies cognitive priority to other activities, ought to differ from that of secondary listening, during which the music assumes a background relationship to other activities.

One of the most obvious and uncontroversial effects of primary listening is that it displaces time from other activities, such as reading, playing with friends, studying, family interaction, watching television, playing video games, and so on. This kind of effect is not related to anything specific about the music--its beat, melody, chord structure--but is what McLeod and Reeves (1981) have called "content diffuse." Whether the end result is functional or dysfunctional depends on the relative immediate and long-term value of the listening experience as compared to the value of the activity it would most likely have replaced. It is not safe to assume that television viewing and radio/stereo listening are using time that would otherwise have been spent in "more constructive" activities--e.g., cooperative, wholesome play with the kid next door or reading the classics.

Primary listening may also have a significant emotional or affective impact. As we have noted, there is evidence that two of the prime determinants of children's musical preferences are the mood and sentiment of the msuic. One doesn't need to refer to empirical studies to make the observation that music has an emotional impact on many listeners. Most rock music is by its very nature an excitatory stimulus, and can arouse the listener (Blaukopf, 1974). Emotional arousal is important for two reasons: First, in the short run, increased arousal can act as generalized stimulus for all sorts of behaviors, i.e., it tends to increase whatever activity seems to be called for in a given context (Huston, Wright & Potts, 1982; Zillman, 1971). Second, there is the possibility that frequent exposure to emotionally arousing material may lead to what Dorr has called "a more generalized evocation of relevant emotions," (Dorr, 1981, p. 338), lasting well beyond the time of exposure. For both reasons, children's emotional/affective responses to audio media seem worthy of attention.

As we have indicated, there is a listening mode in which the music is more or less in the background while other activities are going on. This secondary listening may be facilitative or disruptive, depending on its context and one's point of view. Shoppers and workers with dull, repetitive jobs are frequently treated to background music under the assumption that "performance" will be enhanced. But music in the background may also have a disruptive potential; it may interfere with or distract attention from primary goal-directed activities, especially the more cognitively demanding ones. We would expect the disruptive potential of secondary listening to be especially great among children in early grade school or younger, whose ability to persist in and concentrate on intellectually demanding tasks is limited. The effects on older children or adolescents may be less, but it is still difficult to see how music in the background could operate systematically so as to improve performance on complex and demanding tasks. The most important type of secondary listening is probably the presence of music in the study environment, which, while it may mask environmental noise and create a pleasant ambience, could well interfere with academic performance, perhaps even in the long run.

An attempt has been made here to mention a few promising effects-related hypotheses. We have obviously not covered every aspect. It would be possible to use the children-and-television literature as a model and develop an audio analogue to every proposition that has been formulated therein; we have not put together such a catalogue, focusing instead on a few areas In fact, if the ways children use audio differs from the way they use television--that is, if the two media play different and unique roles in children's lives--then television would be a misleading

model. If audio media are used differently then television, then the processes through which they may have their impact should differ as well. One of the significant challenges in this area arises from the probability that the impact of listening is mediated through siblings, peers, publications (teen magazines. . .) and other communications media (e.g. music video) far more than the impact of television. Music is a culture--or perhaps cultures--and any attempt to sort out the implications of listening must deal with that reality.

CONCLUSIONS: RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The task of this paper has been to review what is known of children's uses of and interactions with audio media. In the process, we have attempted to provide conceptual clarity in those many areas where present evidence is still incomplete. Here we will indicate those substantive concerns and methodological approaches that might be fruitful for future study.

Heading the research agenda for resuming studies of children and audio should be the systematic study of usage and ownership patterns, software purchasing, information sources, and family influence. The development of such baseline data should ideally related audio media to the child's total ecology of information. One useful beginning might be a media profile of entire peer networks, analagous to the survey by Dixon (1979) where purchases of audio equipment and software were correlated with a host of demographic, psychographic, other media use, musical taste, and musical competency variables. Besides updating the Lyle and Hoffman benchmark findings, such data would indicate directions for areas of greatest theoretical interest. The inclusion of more subtle predictor variables

than have been previously utilized--e.g., birth order, family communication rules, and level of cognitive functioning--could well provide rich explanations of audio media use, especially when incorporated in multivariate analysis designs.

While uses and gratifications approaches might orient researchers to typologies of use, there are problems to consider. As most communications researchers who have interviewed children are well aware, their level of verbal facility causes difficulties in instrument design and data interpretation. Moreover, the uses and gratifications approach assumes that a "rational" user can, in fact, accurately report the reasons for using a medium in ways that functionally correlate with usage patterns. In the case of very routinized media activity (especially so with radio, which often operates as an unobtrusive secondary activity), neither can we say with certainty why we attend to media on some occasions nor can we always be aware of accidental media exposure. (The problems involved in taking respondents' gratification reports at face value are cited in Messaris [1977].) Finally, uses and gratifications remains bound to an operational view of media use centered in individuals, rather than as constituted in social occasions. This emphasis is unsatisfactory for understanding a phenomenon, music listening, for which the experiential nature is heavily dependent on social-structural and situational components.

We would argue that treating children's accounts of their audio media use and perceptions--together with systematic observations of audio-related artifacts and family communication behavior--as primary data for reconstructiong the child's life world is a productive alternative. The logic of naturalistic inquiry (Denzin, 1978) requires the researcher to situate his or her activities in the symbolic arenas of subjects and

develop sensitive concepts of the phenomena under study. The triangulation of several methods--such as participant observation, depth interviews, and user diaries--would have the effect of cross-validating the emerging constructs of audio media use. Also, the sampling of behaviors over time should be conducted in terms of the children's own patterns of media use. The use of innovative research technology, such as the electronic pagers carried by adolescents in the Larson and Kubey (1983) study, might be required to track the often-elusive cycles of audio media use.

It should be clear by now that we are aware that the application of a simple "effects" paradigm does considerable violence to what is certainly a very complicated web of processes. Still, this paper has made reference to some arenas in which audio media might influence the perceptions of children, including the acquisition of certain information from lyrics and the interference with cognitive skills and styles from what we have called "primary listening." While recognizing the legion of intervening variables that figure in these processes, it still makes sense to examine lyrical content and the musical symbol system for characteristics which may have impact on children's cognitions. This, of course, calls for content analysis, but of a certain type.

First, it is not enough to examine lyrics for broad themes and subjects. The fact that romantic love is the focus of roughly half the top songs on the charts tells us little about their specific meanings (i.e., the concrete scenarios which, on repetition, might form the basis of social scripts) or how children might interpret them. So, the analyses must be <u>sensitive</u> to the textual significance of the characters, actions, and atmospheres represented in lyrics. They should also be, to the extent possible, <u>value-free</u>. That is, rather than enter the task with certain

assumptions about, for instance, how divorced people are portrayed in pop music, it would be preferable to describe the content objectively and nondogmatically, leaving aside questions of how it ought to be interpreted or how it was intended, and leaving open the possibility that children will come away from their musical encounters with meanings quite different than adults.

Finally, such analyses should be informed by the very data on uses and ownership patterns which we called for earlier in this paper. Whether or not one concurs with the assumption that television viewing is largely nonselective, one must grant that music preferences can be quite specific, involving strong loyalties to radio stations and musical genres. To the extent that studies demonstrate coherent patterns of preference, and to the extent that the music subsumed in those patterns presents a consistent view of certain aspects of social life, we may then begin to hypothesize social and cognitive effects with, under certain conditions, implications for both the individual child and the society in general.

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